

Swann (or Swan), Samuel ^[1]

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by Mattie Erma E. Parker, 1994

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Samuel Swann (or Swan), Council member, secretary, justice in North Carolina, and burgess, justice, and high sheriff ^[2] in Virginia, was born at his father's plantation, Swann's Point, in Surry County, Va. He was the son of Colonel Thomas Swann ^[3] (May 1616–16 Sept. 1680) and his second wife, Sarah Cod or Codd (d. 13 Jan. 1654/55). His paternal grandparents were William (ca. 1587–28 Feb. 1637/38) and Judith Swann (5 Feb. 1589/90–16 Mar. 1636/37). William and Judith had migrated to Virginia from the County of Kent, England, before 1635 and settled in the area that became Surry County.

The Swann family had held land in the counties of Kent and Derby since the time of William the Conqueror. In the seventeenth century a number of its members migrated to America, some settling in Virginia and others in New England and elsewhere. A Thomas Swann of Roxbury, Mass., was associated with North Carolina through trade and lived in that colony for a time, but he was not a member of Samuel's immediate family.

Swann's father, Colonel Thomas Swann, was prominent in the political affairs of Virginia. He was a justice of the Surry County Court, served at least four terms in the House of Burgesses, and was a member of the Council from 1659 until his death. He was married five times and had fourteen children, of whom all but four died young. His wives, in addition to Samuel's mother, were Margaret Delton (d. 1646), Sarah Chandler (d. 1662), Ann Brown (d. 1668), and Mary Mansfield, who survived him. All of his surviving children except Samuel were born of his fifth marriage. They were Mary (b. 5 Oct. 1669), who married Richard Bland; Thomas (b. 14 Dec. 1670), who married Eliza Thompson; and Sarah, who married Henry Randolph and later, Giles Webb.

Samuel Swann entered political life in Virginia in 1674, when he became a commissioner for Surry County, an office that carried the powers of justice of the peace. In 1676 he was high sheriff. He was a burgess in the Assembly of 1677 and in nearly all, if not all, subsequent sessions through 1695. In the 1680s he was deputy escheator for an area that included the counties of Surry, Nansemond, and Isle of Wight. Like his father, he was an officer in the militia ^[4], attaining the rank of major, a title by which he was designated for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, he acquired extensive landholdings and became well-to-do, aided no doubt by his father, one of the wealthiest men in Surry.

The time that Swann began his association with North Carolina and the reasons for it are not known. Surviving records show only that he was serving on the North Carolina Council and as surveyor general ^[5] by March 1693/94. It is noteworthy that Philip Ludwell ^[6], a fellow Virginian and an acquaintance of Swann, was acting governor of North Carolina at that time. No doubt Ludwell facilitated, if he did not initiate, the move. Swann appears for a time to have regarded his North Carolina connection as temporary or tentative. He retained residence in Virginia for more than a year after assuming office in the neighboring colony and even served in the Virginia Assembly in April 1695. By 1696, however, he had moved his family to North Carolina and appointed an attorney to handle his Virginia affairs.

Swann remained on the North Carolina Council for the rest of his life. As Council member he was ex officio justice of several courts, including the Palatine's court ^[7], Court of Chancery ^[8], and General Court. Although the General Court was reorganized in 1698 and no longer was held by the entire Council, Swann continued as a justice until July 1703, sitting under commission from the Council.

About 1700 he was appointed secretary of the colony, serving until about 1704. He probably continued as surveyor general until 1703, when another was appointed to that position. In 1696 he was customs collector for Pasquotank and Perquimans, an office that he held for several years.

Swann lived in Perquimans Precinct, where he was a merchant-planter. He was especially interested in distilling, buying, and exporting tar ^[9]. He also practiced as an attorney before the General Court, stepping down from the bench to handle his cases, as was the custom of the time. He acquired extensive landholdings in North Carolina and appears to have speculated in land. He became one of the wealthiest men in the colony and one of the most powerful politically. A staunch Anglican, he was a leader in the political struggles of the early 1700s that resulted in the establishment of the Anglican church ^[10]. He also devoted his private efforts and means to his church and was building an Anglican chapel, one of the first in the colony, at the time of his death.

Swann was married twice. His first wife was Sarah Drummond (b. 2 Mar. 1654), the daughter of William Drummond ^[11], the first governor of North Carolina, and his wife Sarah. Samuel and Sarah were married on 24 Mar. 1673/74. They had nine children, but four died before the family moved to North Carolina. The surviving children were William ^[12] (b. 5 Nov. 1678), Samuel (b. 2 May 1681), Sampson (b. 19 Feb. 1684), Henry (b. 16 June 1688), and Thomas (b. 29 Oct. 1689). Sarah died

on 18 Apr. 1696 in North Carolina. She was buried in Virginia at Swann's Point, where her mother and Swann's parents and grandparents were buried.

Swann's second wife was Elizabeth Fendall (b. 17 June 1679), the widow of John Fendall and the daughter of Alexander Lillington and his second wife, Elizabeth Cook. That marriage took place on 19 May 1698. The couple had four children: Elizabeth (b. 26 June 1699), Sarah (b. 29 Dec. 1701), Samuel^[13] (b. 31 Oct. 1704), and John^[14] (b. 25 Apr. 1707).

Swann died at his plantation in Perquimans, where he was buried. He was survived by his wife, Elizabeth, by the four children born of his second marriage, and by four of the sons of his first marriage. Swann's widow was remarried twice, first to Alexander Goodlatt, who died about 1713, and subsequently to Maurice Moore^[15]. In the early 1720s she moved with Moore to the Cape Fear region. She died before July 1734 and was buried on Moore's plantation at Rocky Point.

A few years before his death, Swann lost one of his older sons, Samuel, Jr., who was drowned in Roanoke Inlet in 1702. Although he was only twenty-one, Samuel, Jr., was a justice of Perquimans Precinct Court when he died. He left a wife, Mary, who was a daughter of Alexander Lillington^[16] and a sister of Elizabeth, the wife of Swann, Sr. Surviving records indicate, but do not explicitly state, that Mary later married Jeremiah Vail^[17] and was the mother of Jeremiah, Jr., John, Moseley, and Mary. Records also indicate, but not conclusively, that the Samuel Swann of Perquimans who died in 1753 was the son of Samuel, Jr., and his wife Mary. Some writers have erroneously identified him as the son of Swann, Sr., apparently being unaware of the death of Samuel, Jr.

Much confusion has existed among genealogists and historians respecting the identity of particular members of the Swann family and of families with which they intermarried, especially the Jones family. The confusion is caused in part by duplication in names. Samuel Swann, Sr., had three sons named Samuel: a son who was born in Virginia in 1674 and died there in 1677; a son, born in Virginia in 1681, who moved with his family to North Carolina and died there by drowning in 1702, as stated above; and a son born in Perquimans Precinct in 1704, who had a long, distinguished political career and died in New Hanover County^[18] in 1774. The confusion caused by Swann's having more than one son bearing his name is compounded by his having several grandsons and great-grandsons named Samuel, some of whom historians have confused with their fathers or uncles.

Swann's son Sampson appears also to have died in early manhood. He was named in his father's will, but no later reference to him has been found.

All but one of Swann's remaining sons and a number of his grandsons entered public life. Throughout much of the eighteenth century the North Carolina Assembly included two or more members of the Swann family. For nearly a decade in midcentury two of Swann's sons held two of the highest offices in the colony simultaneously, Samuel as speaker of the Assembly and John as a Council member.

Swann's eldest son, William^[12], settled in Currituck^[19], where he was a justice of the precinct court. He served four terms in the Assembly and was speaker in 1711. He was appointed to the Currituck vestry in 1715. He probably died soon after 12 Apr. 1723, when he made a codicil to his will. No record of his marriage has been found, but a Samuel Swann who was justice of the Currituck court in 1720 may have been his son.

Henry Swann lived for a time in Perquimans, where he was a merchant-planter. He later moved to Currituck, where he was living at the time of his death. He died before September 1724. He had at least one son, Thomas, but nothing more is known of his family. He appears to have taken no active part in politics.

Thomas, who settled in Pasquotank Precinct, also was a merchant-planter. In 1716 he was licensed to practice law in the General Court. He was a member of the Assembly for several years in the 1720s and was speaker in 1724 and 1729. He was treasurer for Pasquotank Precinct in 1732. He was married twice. In 1718 he married Demaris Sanderson, the widow of Richard Sanderson, Sr., but she died about a year later. His second wife was named Rebecca. He died in 1733, survived by wife Rebecca and four children: Samuel, William, Rebecca, and Elizabeth.

The children born of Swann's second marriage ranged in age from eight years to five months when their father died. They were reared under the care of their stepfathers and the closely knit Lillington family. Elizabeth, the eldest, married John Baptista Ashe^[20] and moved with him to the Cape Fear. She died before November 1731, survived by her husband and three children: John, Samuel, and Mary.

Sarah, next in age, married Thomas Jones, a lawyer of Virginia. He apparently was not related to Chief Justice Frederick Jones^[21] of North Carolina, whom some writers have erroneously identified as Sarah's husband. It is uncertain whether or not Sarah and her husband settled in Virginia or in North Carolina.

Swann's son Samuel^[13] (b. 1704) probably was the most prominent of his children. He served in the Assembly for almost forty years and was speaker for nearly twenty, retiring in 1762. He spent his early life in Perquimans but moved to New Hanover County about 1731. He married Jane Jones, the eldest daughter of Chief Justice Frederick and Jane Jones. He died in 1774, survived by his wife, Jane, a son, Samuel, and a daughter, Jane.

Swann's youngest son, John, also settled in New Hanover County. Like his brother Samuel, he was active in politics for much of his life. He was a member of the Assembly in 1733 and from 1739 to September 1751, when he was appointed to the Council. He remained on the Council until his death, which occurred about December 1761. He was married twice. His first wife, Elizabeth, was the stepdaughter of Tobias Knight^[22]. His second wife was Ann Moore, the daughter of Roger Moore^[23] of Orton Plantation. He had no children.

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